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ABSTRACT

This research study was conducted to determine if teacher interns' perceptions of professional support are related to the quality of interpersonal experience or to extraneous variables such as class size, grade level, sex of intern, and school setting (urban or suburban). Intern perception of professional support received from school administrators, teachers, and university supervisors was also measured. The subjects of the study, 45 graduate students of education, had the responsibilities of first-year teachers in 45 urban and suburban schools for the 1972-73 academic year. At the end of the school year, interns completed a demographic survey regarding class size, school setting, grade level, etc. and a 20-item questionnaire with responses ranked on a five-point scale designed to measure level of support received from school administrators, colleagues, and university supervisors. Results of the study indicate that a) interns felt that university supervisors were more supportive than school administrators; b) suburban school administrators were seen as more supportive than urban administrators; and c) extraneous variables were not a major factor affecting intern perceptions of professional support. Intern perception of professional support then seems to be an abstract psychological concept which is a product of interpersonal relationships and which is not influenced by class size, grade level, sex of intern, or school setting. (HMD)

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INTERN PERCEPTION OF PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT AND THE LEARNING SITUATION

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In the field of teacher training, there is considerable interest in the manner in which the teaching intern perceives professional support. In addition, there is concern as to how the classroom learning situation influences that perception of professional support. The authors have defined professional support as the approval and encouragement of positive behavior and the ability to sustain confidence and to advocate growth. Support is viewed as a dimension of helping that has a positive effect on the becoming process of teaching. Hopefully, the supportive behavior given to teaching interns contributes to their positive feelings about teaching and children. Rogers (1967) describes support and acceptance as essential to a learner-centered atmosphere in which experimental learning will take place. Johnson and Nussel (1969) suggest that colleague support of change promotes innovation. In addition, comments from interns suggest that as they perceive positive professional support from colleagues, cooperating teachers, administrators, and university supervisors, their perception of the total experience is improved. When placing interns, educational coordinators in teacher training institutions question the impact of the types of teaching situations, such as small classes, suburban settings, team teaching, on the intern's professional support.

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In this study, the authors sought to respond to the question of whether interns' perception of professional support was related to the quality of the interpersonal experience or the following extraneous variables: class size; urban or suburban settings; grade level; sex of intern; and interns' perceptions of reading and interpersonal relations of students. Further, the study explored perceptions of professional support experienced by interns from colleagues, administrators, and university supervisors.

Background and procedures:

The interns, graduate Master of Arts in Teaching students, had the responsibilities of first year teachers in 18 urban and 27 suburban elementary schools for the academic year. These assignments were negotiated by the university. Mutual involvement of the university and the cooperating schools was maintained. This involvement included: visitations of the school administrators and faculty to explain the Master of Arts in Teaching Program; bi-weekly supervision of interns by the university supervisor; participacion of school administrators, faculty, and interns in a series of workshops; and attendance in weekly seminars and individual meetings with the university supervisor during the academic year.

These general questions prompted the inquiry: 1) Are there differences in degree of professional support perceived by interns in primary grades, smaller classes, and suburban settings? 2) Is there a relationship between the degree of professional support experienced by interns and their perception of the reading success and the quality of inter-group relations for the pupils in their classrooms?

The following null hypotheses were tested:

1) For intern teachers, there is no significant difference in their perception of professional support from administrators, colleagues, and university supervisors.

2) For intern teachers in urban and suburban settings, there is no significant difference in their perception of professional support.

3) For intern teachers in teams, working alone, working with another MAT, or paired with a full-time teacher, there is no significant difference in their perception of professional support.

4) For intern teachers in primary, intermediate, or upper grades, there is no significant difference in their perception of professional support.

5) For intern teachers with class size ranging from 0-19, 20-29, and over 30, there is no significant difference in their perception of professional support.

6) For intern teachers who perceive high, moderate, and low quality of intergroup relations (affective behavior) within their classrooms, there is no significant difference in their perception of professional support.

7) For intern teachers who perceive high, moderate, and low reading success in their pupils, there is no significant difference in their perceiption of professional support.

8) For male and female intern teachers, there is no significant difference in their perception of professional support.

Procedure:

The forty-five interns in the Master of Arts in Teaching program who specialized in elementary education were observed in their classroom teaching environments and subsequently were administered the instruments used in this study. All of the participants were involved in paid internships as classroom teachers in their respective schools for the entire 1972-73 school year.

During the first week of May 1973, the interns completed the following: (1) a list of questions concerning demographic information which included grade level taught, class size, sex of intern, urban or suburban location, and whether the intern worked alone, with another intern, with a certified teacher, or as part of a team; (2) an instrument entitled "Intern's Perception of Professional Support from Colleagues, Supervisors, and Administrators of Participating Schools." This instrument was developed by the researchers and consisted of twenty items ranked on 5 point scale, designed to measure various aspects of the concept of professional support by their university supervisors, teaching colleagues, and school administrators; (3) a list of their own pupils with an overall grade for each pupil for reading and for intergroup relations ranked on a 5 point scale.

In this report, primary grades are the kindergarten, first, second, and third; intermediate grades are the fourth, fifth, and sixth; and upper grades are the seventh and eighth. Urban schools are those schools which are located within the city limits of a city with a population of over four million. Suburban

schools are all those schools located outside the city limits, with populations ranging from 10,000 to 80,000.

The collected data was numberically categorized and then analyzed by the university computing facility in a variety of one-way analyses of variance. Appropriate F-ratios at .05 and .01 level were made to determine if there were any statistical differences between the dependent variables and the independent variables of administrator, colleagues, and supervisor support, plus the measurement of total perception of professional support. The summary tables are included in this report.

Findings and Conclusions:

1) The results indicate that the interns' perception of overall professional support was moderately high, mean 3.99 on a one to five point scale. Further analysis of perception of professional support from administratros, colleagues in schools, and university supervisors indicates that the mean for administrators was 3.50; the mean for teaching colleagues was 3.93; and the mean for university supervisors was 4.26. Supervisors were perceived as being significantly more supportive than administrators and teaching colleagues. Stated differently, the perception by MATs of professional support was significantly higher for university supervisors than it was for administrators or colleagues.

Table I

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratio
Between	2	18.23	9.11	5.51*
Within	42	69.45	1.65	
Total	44	87.68		

*Significant .01

2) Significant differences in the perception of professional support by administrators were found when teaching interns in urban and suburban settings were compared. It appears that suburban school administrators were seen as being more supportive to teaching interns than were urban school administrators. However, there were no significant differences in the interns' perceptions of professional support from colleagues and university supervisors, nor in the total perception of professional support when urban and suburban school interns were compared. Due to the multiplicity of variables involved in the comparison of urban and suburban administrators, further research needs to be generated.

Table II

Source	DF	Sum of Square	Mean Squares	F Ratio
Between	1	3.43	3.43	5.45*
Within	43	27.09	.63	
Total	44	30.52		

*Significant .05

3) In the area of reading, significant differences were found in the perception of pupil reading success and the degree of support felt by teaching interns from administrators. Again, there were no significant differences in the interns' perceptions of professional support from colleagues and university supervisors, nor in the total perception of professional support. Because of the complexity of variables involved in the perception of reading performance, further research as indicated.

Table III

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratio
Between	2	4.77	2.39	3.81*
Within	36	22.54	.63	
Total	38	27.31		

*Significant .05

It appears then, that those interns who perceived the administrators as most supportive also perceived better student performance in reading.

4) There were no significant differences in the interns' perceptions of professional support when administrators, colleagues, supervisors, and total support were looked at in relation to the teaching situation (team, working alone, working with a full-time teacher, or working with another MAT), the grade level, the class size, the intern's perception of quality of inter-group relations, or the sex of the intern.

The results of this study seem to indicate that except for administrators when urban and suburban schools and the interns' perceptions of pupils reading performance are compared, support is an abstract psychological concept that is generally not influenced by setting, class size, sex of intern, teaching situation, grade level, or the interns' perceptions of the quality of inter-group relations. In other words, looking at support separately, it seems that support is a product of interpersonal relations and not influenced by most of the extraneous variables such as those included in this study.

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